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The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories

Identical letters dated 5 January 2004 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On 29 December 2003 the Israeli Government gave its authorization for the construction of nine new settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan and for the expansion of existing Israeli settlements in that area. The Israeli Ministerial Committee for Settlements, in announcing this decision, confirmed that $60 million would be allocated for the implementation of the project, which aims at doubling the number of settlers in Israeli-occupied Syrian territory. An Israeli Government Minister furthermore announced that "the Golan is an integral part of Israel".

This provocative decision by Israel comes just a few weeks after the initiative launched by President Bashar al-Asad, the President of the Syrian Arab Republic, to restart peace negotiations between Syria and Israel with a view to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the region. It coincides with Syria's launching, on behalf of the League of Arab States, of another initiative aimed at ridding the Middle East region of weapons of mass destruction. It is also curious that this Israeli decision should come after the adoption by an overwhelming majority of the General Assembly, at its fifty-eighth session, of two resolutions calling on Israel to put an end to its illegal occupation of the Syrian Golan. The resolutions furthermore call on Israel to desist from changing the physical character, institutional structure and legal status of the occupied Syrian Golan and in particular to desist from the establishment of settlements. The resolutions reaffirm that Israel's occupation and de facto annexation of the Syrian Golan constitutes a stumbling block in the way of achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

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Israel's policies and its ongoing defiance of the basic principles of international law and of the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolution 497 (1981) which considers Israeli's annexation of the Golan to be null and void and lacking in any basis in international law, constitute a fundamental obstacle to the international efforts made since the peace process was launched at the Madrid Conference in 1991 to achieve the goal of peace. These Israeli decisions reveal the real objectives of the Israeli leadership, which are incompatible with the aims of establishing such a peace. Decisions such as these prove that Israel's true objective could not be further removed from the quest for a just and comprehensive solution in the region and that Israel's efforts are in fact solely devoted to further expansion of its settlements at the expense of the Arab territories and the rights of the owners of those territories, who have been forcibly uprooted and exiled for over 36 years.

This deplorable decision, which violates international law, together with Israel's ongoing construction of the wall on the Occupied Palestinian Territory are striking examples of Israel's policies of seeking to create new facts on the ground in order to consolidate the occupation and sabotage any efforts at establishing peace in the region. It goes without saying that peace is incompatible with occupation and with any steps to consolidate occupation.

Such expansionist and colonialist decisions will only serve to increase the determination of Syria and its people to regain all of their territory that has been occupied by Israel since 1967. The Israeli people must understand that their Government, by involving them in such decisions, will only inflict on them, their children and the peoples of the entire region further losses and more conflict and instability. They must realize that the only way of guaranteeing peace and security is for Israel to withdraw from the Syrian Golan to the line of June 1967 and from the Palestinian Territory, as well as the remainder of the occupied Lebanese territories.

The way to achieve a just and comprehensive peace is clear and enjoys international consensus. It lies with the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), of the principle of land for peace and of the peace initiative adopted at the Arab Summit held at Beirut in March 2002. The steps that Israel has taken and continues to take to consolidate its occupation of the occupied Arab territories and to increase the number of settlements and settlers are only an obstacle to any solution aimed at restoring the rights of those deprived of them and of achieving security and peace for all.

Syria once again calls on the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Security Council to condemn these new Israeli policies in the strongest terms. Syria calls on the States Members of the United Nations, particularly those countries with the power to influence Israel, to shoulder their responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security by bringing the necessary pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to rescind these grave and reckless decisions, to pursue the path of peace and to respond to Arab initiatives for the resumption of the peace process.

(*Signed*) Fayssal **Mekdad**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative